TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT): (a) to (c) The Regional Sophisticated Instrumentation Centre at Nagpur University (now called Sophisticated Analytical Instrument Facility (SAIF) is functioning at present and the samples from the researchers/users are being regularly analyzed at the SAIF. Necessary action to repair and rectify equipment is invariably taken if such equipment falls into disrepair. Action has also been taken to generally improve the functioning of the Centre.

Price index

1215. SHRI SURESH PACHOURI: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that during the last three years the price index of foodgrains have remained almost stationery while the price index of all commodities has gone up by 14.6 per cent;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to improve the rural economy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) and (b) According to the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) with base 1993-94=100 the WPI of foodgrains declined by 1.2% during 1999-2000 to 2002-2003 while WPI of all commodities increased by 14.8% during the same period. The reason for the marginal decline in the prices of foodgrains can be traced to the comfortable stock position of rice and wheat coupled with remarkable increase in production of foodgrains during both years 1999-2000 and 2001-2002, which ensured adequate availability of foodgrains in the country. As regards the increase in the WPI of all commodities, it may be noted that the WPI in respect of the major group "fuel, power, light and lubricants" increased by 47.7% during the period 1999-2000—2002-2003 while the WPI in respect of the major group "manufactured products" increased by 7.9% during this period. The WPI for the broad group "primary articles" increased by 10.1% during the same period. Though WPI for the sub-group "foodgrains" forms a part of primary articles, its share in the weight of the broad group "primary articles" is relatively low and hence the decline in the prices of foodgrains during 1999-2000—2002-2003 was more than offset by the increase in the prices of other items in the broad group of primary articles.

(c) Government of India have been implementing a number of schems/ programmes for improving irrigation facilities and rural infrastructure. These include Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme for expeditious completion of ongoing major and medium irrigation projects, Drought Prone Area Programme, Desert Development Programme, National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas, Integrated Wasteland Development Programme, Rural Infrastructure Development fund established in NABARD to provide financial assistance to State Governments to augment investments in irrigation, Rural roads and bridges, market yards/godowns, inland waterways etc. Besides, with a view to pass on the benefit of declining interest rate to agriculture sector, public sector banks have reduced their lending rates for agriculture to a maximum of 9 percent per annum on crop loans up to a ceiling of Rs. 50,000. These schemes/programmes are expected to go a long way in improving agricultural production and productivity, thereby improving the rural economy.

Bio-technological developments for agriculture

1216. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether as per a recent report, India's population would stablize by 2050 when the population is expected to be 1.9 billion;

(b) whether, in order to provide food security to such a huge population, farmers will have to resort to new bio-technological developments; and

(c) if so, Government plans in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT): (a) Yes, Sir. In a recently held workshop on the Role of Biotechnology in Agriculture organized by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) it was brought out that population of the country is likely to stablize by 2050 at a level of 1.9 billion.

(b) and (c) The biotechnological interventions are playing and would continue to play a significant role in sustainable food security of the